DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 095 TM 029 632

AUTHOR	Ediger, Marlow
TITLE	Evaluation, Handwriting, and Its Importance.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Handwriting; Thinking Skills; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Although it is a skill that is often ignored, handwriting is an important aspect of education, especially at the elementary school level. Word processors are not always available, and there is frequently a need to write something that others must read. Students should receive instruction in specific handwriting problems, and it is best if learners practice handwriting skills in functional writing, rather than simply practicing handwriting skills in isolated practice. Some students, however, may need intensive practice so that what they write can be read with ease. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 429 095

Evaluation, Handwriting, and Its Importance

Marlow Ediger

Marlow Ediger

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TM029632

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EVALUATION, HANDWRITING, AND ITS IMPORTANCE

When attending the elementary school years 1934-1942, I experienced fifteen to twenty minutes of handwriting instruction per day. Much time was spent on using models presented by Zaner Blosser company of handwriting instruction. Teachers were prone then to emphasize the specifics of this model in writing legibly. Time was then given also to push and pull exercises as well as making ovals. The latter, no doubt, was stressed to provide control over the finer muscles when writing. Handwriting was seemingly taught as a separate subject, not thoroughly integrated with other curriculum areas. And yet, there was stress placed upon legibility, not the Zaner Blosser model, in developing outlines, reports, and other written products. Writing in the air was emphasized by teachers in handwriting with hopes of transfer here from that experience to legible written work. I attended elementary school in Mc Pherson County, Kansas and each year there was a county handwriting contest. My sister received a second prize ribbon two years in a row in the competitive handwriting endeavor for the grade level she was in. Whereas, I received a red ribbon, second prize, two years in a row for spelling competition in the county. Correct spelling of words does emphasize legible handwriting. I believe one can see here the heavy emphasis placed upon handwriting and spelling during those years of schooling (See Ediger, 1988, 53-55). Articles and talks at teacher education conventions, presently, do not appear to emphasize the degree of quality handwriting as was true twenty and more years ago. Why might this be the case? The school day on the elementary level is already overcrowded to make room for special time for handwriting instruction. Thus, a handwriting across the curriculum philosophy is increasingly being stressed. General legibility becomes a key objective in handwriting rather than a specific methodology to increase legibility as emphasized from a basal test. I believe the word processor has also deemphasized the importance of handwriting instruction in the elementary school. I wrote all of my manuscripts in longhand when having typing services available from work study students on the university level. I had never had a typing class and thus learned to use the word processor at age sixty. It was do or die, meaning either learn to use the word processor or stop writing manuscripts and books. I did not want to do the latter and so used the total immersion approach in learning proper techniques on my own in typing in the commands in a word processor. My two second place ribbons won in spelling in the McPherson County, Kansas Spelling Contest does not show up in typing. But it does help to be close enough in correct spelling of words so that spell check takes immediate control in taking care of the errors in

word processor use. In other words, the spelling has to be close enough for spell check to correct errors. Otherwise, I am still the excellent speller as was true on the elementary years as well as now when I write in longhand. My handwriting is fairly legible. Should an increased emphasis today be placed upon handwriting instruction in the elementary school years? My answer is a definite "yes." (See Ediger, 1997, 340-341).

Why Should Handwriting Be Taught?

There are a number of reasons why handwriting should be stressed adequately in the elementary school, and perhaps later years of schooling also. At this point we do not all have word processors. If we have word processors, they cannot be carried around conveniently; even the lap top computer takes special arrangements for use. Writing in longhand is much more convenient in many places. I can write a letter in longhand rather rapidly, much more so than using the word processor, especially when being away from home. There might be exceptions for some in the area of writing letters at home and using the latest of technology. For example, when checking the correctness of a Master Card statement received, I can add more rapidly using paper and pencil, mostly pencil, as compared to using a hand held calculator. Our three adult children rarely add using pencil, but use a calculator instead. They also use a word processor for almost all written work. except when making quick lists as for shopping and placing it on the refrigerator door. My adult children do complain about receiving letters written in longhand whereby it is difficult indeed to decipher what has been written. I also have received letters in longhand which I cannot interpret due to illegible handwriting. In fact, this last December, my wife and I received a Greeting Card whereby the names signed were illegible and we could not determine who sent this Christmas card.

The following are cases in which writing in longhand might well be very important to communicate accurately:

1. a note of commendation to a pupil during the school day for outstanding work performed.
2. a classroom newspaper developed cooperatively by pupils and the teacher in which the agreed upon contents are written on the chalkboard. The chalkboard content is then written by each pupil and taken home for parents to see. One of my student teachers whom I supervised in Cedar Rapids, Iowa used this procedure to inform parents of what was done each school day of the week in different curriculum areas. It was a personal way to communicate with parents with pupils using their own personal writing skills and paper. I noticed many letters written by parents thanking the student teacher for informing as to which

objectives the school is emphasizing in the curriculum.

3. notes sent to parents indicated good work the involved pupil did in an ongoing activity.

4. journal writing by pupils pertaining to what was learned in an ongoing experience.

5. written work pertaining to drill and practice as well as problem solving in mathematics.

6. summaries of science experiments performed.

7. diary entries kept of what was learned in social studies on a day to day basis.

8. records kept of trade books read in a literature based curriculum.

9. logs summarizing diary entries kept in social studies.

10. plans made for project methods of learning opportunities (Ediger, 1997, 1-17).

The overall objective in handwriting should be legibility to communicate written ideas. To achieve this overall objective the teacher needs to think of learning opportunities to guide pupils in goal attainment.

Each learning opportunity should be

1. interesting to capture pupil attention to improved handwriting.

2. purposeful so that pupils perceive reasons for improvement in handwriting legibility.

3. goal centered so that individual pupils may achieve objectives of instruction for legibility in written communication.

4. utilitarian in that pupils may apply what has been learned in a lifelike situation.

5. meaningful in that what is stressed makes sense to the involved learner.

6. integrated to make for quality handwriting across the curriculum.

7. motivating so that pupils have an inward desire to improve legibility in handwriting.

8. devised to provide for optimal individual levels of pupil achievement.

9. encouraging individual and committee/collaborative work in handwriting experiences.

10. implemented so that encouragement is there for pupils to take personal pride in quality handwriting (See Ediger, 1997, 35-38).

Psychology in Handwriting Instruction

There are selected tenets of educational psychology which teachers may apply in the classroom to assist pupils to achieve well in handwriting. I like reinforcement theory from behaviorism as a psychology of learning. Thus, the teacher gives honest praise to pupils

for individual improvement in handwriting. The praise should reinforce pupils to do better in handwriting. From humanism as a psychology of learning, I like the psychological sequence approach in determining the order of learning opportunities for pupils. Thus, pupils with teacher guidance, plan sequential learning opportunities in handwriting (See Ediger, 1998, 204-210). The learner then is involved in ordering is/her own experiences in handwriting. this might well include diagnostic procedures such as

1. spacing between letters and words.
2. alignment of letters and words.
3. legibility in slant of letters.
4. proper proportion of letters in lower case.
5. appropriate proportion between lower and upper case letters.

Pupils with teacher guidance, using humanism as a psychology of learning, might also plan learning opportunities such as the following integrating handwriting with diverse purposes in functional writing:

1. business and friendly letters.
2. note taking by pupils.
3. journalism between the child and the parents or guardians.
4. book reports in different academic areas.
5. play writing for a class or school performance.

Pupils then need to use what has been learned from handwriting experiences to the every day use of written communication where legibility is very important. I have an acquaintance who works in a mail order company. He states that its surprising how many orders cannot be interpreted correctly due to poor quality handwriting. The mail order company could hold overhead to lower levels if customers would write orders legibly so that the receiver can accurately read what was ordered. The consumer would save time and effort if the order were legibly written. It is very important then for individuals to be able to write orders legibly so that overhead costs may be kept down for businesses as well as for the unnecessary extra work that needs to be by the consumer when receiving notice for clarification of an order made.

A friend of mine recently showed me a letter that he could not decipher. I viewed it very carefully to ascertain the meaning of the contents. A few word were "legible," but it took much effort to read most parts of the letter with any degree of interpretation. I must say that I realized here more than ever the importance of being able to write legibly. Maybe the meaning was there of the contents for the writer, but the receiver could not attach understanding to much of the writing. In grading essay examinations of undergraduate and graduate students, it is surprising how may have grave problems in legible writing. It takes much time then to read these papers for evaluation purposes. The

following are major problems of university students in cursive handwriting:

1. not dotting the lower case letter "i" and leaving a loop in that letter making it appear as the letter "e," in cursive writing. Or, writing, the lower case "l" too small making it appear as an "e" in cursive form.
2. not keeping words separate in writing but running selected words together.
3. alignment being improper and thus running words together from one line to the next, making for distorted words and letters.
4. improper formation of letters whereby the capitol letter "B' in cursive writing looks like an "R."
5. reversing the letters "d" and "b" in manuscript writing. Yes, there are university students who also have selected difficulties with making reversals.

I have had conferences with a few university students pointing out where poor quality handwriting does interfere with communication of ideas. With individual students, I have discussed specific problems in handwriting which need to be improved upon. When these students apply for a position or job, poor quality handwriting should not stand in the way of being a proficient employee.

In summary

Pupils should receive instruction in specific problems in handwriting which need to be eliminated so that quality communication may be in the offing. Best it is if learners use proper handwriting skills in functional writing, such as in the communication of ideas from the sender to the receiver, rather than practicing isolated skills in handwriting. However, the latter may need emphasis with individual pupils so that the receiver of the written content may interpret it in a meaningful manner (See Ediger, 1996, 71-76).

References

Ediger, Marlow (1988), "Handwriting and the Pupil, Language Arts Curriculum in the Elementary. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing company, 53-55.

Ediger, Marlow (1997), "Examining the Merits of Old Order Amish Education, Education, 117 (3), 340-341.

Ediger, Marlow (1997), Teaching Reading and the Language Arts in the Elementary School. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing, Company, 1-17.

Ediger, Marlow (1997), Social Studies Curriculum in the Elementary School. Fourth edition. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, 35-37.

Ediger, Marlow (1998), Teaching Reading Successfully in the Elementary School. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, 204-210.

Ediger, Marlow (1996), Elementary Education. Kirksville, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, 71-76.